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ANGLO-FRENCH COMMERCIAL RIVALRY, 1700-1750: THE WESTERN PHASE, II.

BEFORE 1700 the problem of French competition with England in the commercial world of the West had not become sufficiently prominent to demand a solution, but in the eighteenth century important changes took place which materially altered the situation. The area of the French sugar-producing colonies was enlarged by the addition of new territory, notably a considerable portion of the island of Santo Domingo or Hispaniola, where the soils were "new, vastly extended, incomparably more fertile, and easier of cultivation than any other Sugar Country in the World".¹ The French government at home gave renewed encouragement to its sugar colonies, transported planters and aided them to subsist, paid the salaries of their governors, and took care to strengthen and secure their settlements against attack. By new edicts it permitted the colonists to carry their sugars directly to Spain, thus ensuring further shipment to Italy and even to Turkey.² In consequence, the French output of sugar and its by-products was doubled and trebled and the demand of the French colonies for lumber, live-stock, and provisions became correspondingly great. Until this time the northern British colonies had been accustomed to send their surplus products to the southern continental colonies or to the

¹ Robertson, *An Enquiry into the Methods that are said to be now proposed in England to retrieve the Sugar Trade* (1733), p. 7. In its representation of January 14, 1735, the Board of Trade said that the worn-out state of Barbadoes required more labor and laborers than the fresh lands of Hispaniola and other islands (p. 14, printed copy). The circumstances of the French occupation of the island are given as follows: "The French first Settled on a small Island called Tobago, near the N. W. End of the Island of St. Domingo, and finding vast tracts of Land Uncultivated, opposite to them, they made bold to Remove and to take possession of that part which was of no use or disregarded by the Spaniards, who at first despised the Encroachments of the French or thought it not worth their while to dispossess them; or whether by mere negligence or other mistakes of that Indolent Nation they omitted to Suppress them when they might easily have done it. They are now become very numerous, in Actual possession of $\frac{3}{4}$ parts of the Island and in a few Years will in all probability entirely dispossess the Spaniards." "Observations on St. Domingo commonly called Hispaniola", by James Knight, October 21, 1740. British Museum, Add. MSS. 32695, f. 309. The French even tried to seize Jamaica in 1694, but were unsuccessful. *Cal. St. P., Col.*, 1693-1696, §§ 1236 I., 1410.

² Robertson, *A Supplement to the Detection of the State and Situation of the Present Sugar Planters of Barbadoes and the Leeward Islands* (1733), pp. 16-18, 62-63.

British West Indies, thus fulfilling their mercantilist function as purveyors of supplemental staples to the British tropical and semi-tropical colonies. But this carefully adjusted equilibrium could not be maintained, as colonial conditions refused to remain stationary and the Northern Colonies refused to confine their activities to "such Produce, Trade, and Manufactures as are most for the Benefit of Great Britain" or to be diverted from raising more "of Cattle and Provisions than are needful or convenient for themselves".³ The growth of the northern British colonies and the increase in production of lumber, livestock, and provisions destroyed the balance, and the rise of new economic conditions and trade requirements rendered inevitable the overthrow of this part of the mercantilist scheme. The surplus products of New England, New York, and Pennsylvania had to find a wider market and as they were not wanted in England, it is hardly surprising that the quick-witted traders of the North should have discovered the profitable opportunities that the needs of the French sugar colonies furnished.

According to every contemporary account all the British sugar

³ To the mercantilist, England seemed criminally negligent in having allowed the Northern Colonies "to employ themselves so long in such Trade and Labours as it is evident interfere with her own essential Interests". They would have preferred that England should compel the colonies to expend all surplus energy in producing hemp, flax, silk, iron, potash, copper, and naval stores, instead of devoting it to raising provisions, livestock, and lumber. Robertson, *A Supplement*, pp. 49-51; *An Enquiry*, pp. 9-10. It is, of course, well known that the Board of Trade made many efforts to persuade the Northern Colonies to produce the staples desired by the mercantilists. The most noteworthy effort of this kind was in 1734, when the House of Lords adopted a resolution of its committee recommending that the Board of Trade be instructed to report on the encouragements necessary "to engage the Inhabitants of the British Colonies on the Continent of America to apply their Industry to the Cultivation of Naval Stores of all Kinds and likewise of such other Products as may be proper for the Soil of the said Colonies, and do not interfere with the Trade or Produce of Great Britain" (*Lords Journal*, XXIV, 412). Acting on this order, the board wrote a circular letter to the colonies asking for the desired information, and on January 14, 1735, sent to the House of Lords a representation "Relating to the State of the British Islands in America. . . . As likewise to such Encouragements as may be necessary to engage the Inhabitants", etc. (printed, manuscript copy in C. O. 324: 12, pp. 79-120). In this representation the board suggested that Parliament pass measures to encourage in the plantations the production of naval stores, wine, hemp, flax, silk, iron, pot and pearl ashes, and certain drugs (p. 17), and this Parliament did in the case of silk, indigo, and pot and pearl ashes. Varying quantities of tar, pitch, turpentine, potash, flax-seed, and iron were exported to England and Ireland. Whale oil, also, was in demand at home and a small amount of indigo was sent over. The latter came mostly from the French West Indies, notably Hispaniola, but it is interesting to observe that Connecticut, acting on the recommendation of Parliament, endeavored to promote its cultivation in the colony. Conn. Arch., Foreign Correspondence, II., doc. 163a.

islands, except Jamaica, were declining, and their demand, which even in times of prosperity would not have been sufficient to take off the entire output of the Northern Colonies, was unable to keep pace with the supply. The New Englanders could sell to the French more cheaply than could the merchants of France and had a monopoly of the trade as long as the French island market was not glutted.⁴ On the other hand they could buy more cheaply in the French and Dutch West India market, where the foreign planters, with only a one per cent. export duty to meet, were better off than the English with their eighteen pence per hundred plantation duty of 1672 and their four and a half per cent. export duty of 1663, and where French sugars were rated from twenty-five to thirty per cent. cheaper than were those of Barbadoes and the Leeward Islands.⁵ Molasses, too, they could obtain for about what they were willing to pay, as it was a commodity practically worthless to the French. The value of this trade, in which the French could undersell the British planters, was so great that the governors of the French islands were authorized to issue at their discretion permits for trade to masters of colonial and British vessels, purchasable at prices dependent on the value of the cargo.⁶

Despite the agreement entered into in 1686 between England and France that the subjects of the one were not to frequent the ports

⁴ Provisions brought in French ships, belonging to Nantes, Bordeaux, and other French cities, generally came from Ireland. Robertson repudiates the assertion that lumber, horses, or provisions could be furnished "at a tolerable price" from any of the French settlements in Canada or the Mississippi region. "Let them try to procure their Lumber from those places", he says, "if they can". *A Supplement*, p. 25. One of the objections raised by the Northern Colonies to the first Molasses Bill, that of 1731, was that if the French were prevented from trading with these colonies as the bill proposed, they would build up Canada and Cape Breton as provision and lumber supplying regions, and in so doing strengthen French control in Canada to the serious danger of the British colonies to the southward.

⁵ Lieut.-Gov. Nanfan of New York bought sugars at Martinique twenty-five per cent. cheaper than they were rated at Barbadoes. Robertson and others reported the difference at thirty per cent. *A Supplement*, p. 16.

⁶ This fact was brought out in the inquiry before the House of Commons (*Commons Journal*, XXI. 686). Ample additional testimony exists. "There has been sixteen to twenty New England Vessels at Martinico at a time, each of which had a writing purporting a permission to sell." "This trade is permitted by the French government, as well because the French planters have no other way to dispose of their Rum and Molasses as because the French can't be supplied with Horses and Lumber from any other places but the English Northern Colonies." *Observations on the Case of the Northern Colonies* (1731), pp. 27-28, 29. For a detailed statement of the cost of raising sugar in Barbadoes and the Leeward Islands, see Robertson, *A Detection of the State and Situation of the Present Sugar Planters of Barbadoes and the Leeward Islands* (1732), pp. 40-49.

of, or trade with, the other, or in any manner to interfere with the commerce belonging to the subjects of the other,⁷ this trade attained large proportions. We hear of "unlawful trade with the French" as early as 1700,⁸ and so zealous were certain of the island governors to observe and execute the instructions given them in this particular that they even caused British ships trading with the French islands to be seized and condemned.⁹ At the same time, whenever the French islands found themselves sufficiently stocked with staples from the north or the wheat harvest in France was sufficiently bountiful, they were wont to seize vessels from Ireland and the Northern Colonies in order to check what they called, when it was advantageous to do so, a contraband trade.¹⁰ This trade customarily took two forms. The northern colonists might sell their produce to the British West Indies for cash and passing on, purchase their return cargo from the French islands, a traffic estimated at one-third to one-half of the whole; or they might carry their horses, building materials, and provisions, and other plantation necessities directly to the French or other foreign islands and there exchange them either for cash or more frequently for sugar, molasses, and rum.¹¹ In either case, the loss fell on the British West

⁷ "Treaty of Peace, Good Correspondence, and Neutrality in America", Whitehall, November 6/16, 1686, §§ 5, 6. Printed in full, *Commons Journal*, XXI. 713-715.

⁸ *Cal. St. P., Col.*, 1700, § 789.

⁹ "Their Lordships observing that the Governors have so farr mistaken the Sense of the said Articles and their Instructions grounded thereon as to proceed to the Condemnation of the Ships and Cargoes belonging to His Majestys Subjects under pretence of their having Contravened the said Articles by Trading to the French Plantations, which was not the Sense of those Articles, which could only entitle His Majestys Governors to Condemn French Ships Trading to our Plantations, there being no Law to Justify the Condemnation of Ships belonging to His Majestys Subjects for such Trade." *Acts of the Privy Council, Col.*, vol. III., § 149; see also *ibid.*, § 405.

¹⁰ "The traders of our Northern Colonies wou'd not come near any English Island in the West Indies, if it were not that the French, when glutted with Lumber, Horses, and Provisions, prohibit all farther commerce with them." Robertson, *A Supplement*, pp. 21, 41.

¹¹ Capt. Penmure of the Rhode Island sloop *Charming Polly*, according to an extant sailing agreement of 1752, was to go first to St. Vincent, then to Dominica, and then to St. Eustatius, selling his cargo as he could, for cash if possible, but for goods if such only could be obtained in exchange. In the latter case all goods were to be disposed of for cash at St. Eustatius, and with only money in hand, he was to go to Hispaniola and there buy indigo, muscovado, and molasses for the home voyage. At this time (1752) neither St. Vincent nor Dominica were British islands, being supposedly neutral according to the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, St. Eustatius was Dutch, and Hispaniola was part Spanish and part French. The agreement authorized the captain to secure a "French pass". *Commerce of Rhode Island* (Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., seventh series), IX. 60-61.

Indian planters, denuding them of their coin,¹² of which they had none too much, or cutting into their market for sugar and depriving them of their needed supply of provisions and lumber. The situation was a very undesirable one from the point of view of the British sugar planter, and equally unsatisfactory from the point of view of the British customs, for all "dead" commodities exported from the French islands to the northern British colonies meant to the British exchequer a loss by just so much of the four and a half per cent. and the plantation duties.¹³

Hispaniola rivalled St. Eustatius as an entrepôt for foreign commodities. "En general son Commerce Consiste en sucres blancs et bruts, Indigos Cafféés, Cuirs, et quelques autres effets de peu de Consequence; comme Tabac Caret Gingembre, etc. Mais une grande Branche de son commerce, consiste encore en Marchandises seches de France, comme toiles, Chapeaux D'orures, Etoffes de Soye, etc. que les Espagnols y Viennent achepter, et qu'ils paient en or et en argent." From a long and valuable account of Santo Domingo, entitled "Lettre a [M. Mildmay] sur le commerce present de St. Domingue et l'Etat present de Cette Colonie" (Paris, May, 1751), Brit. Mus., Add. MSS. 32828, ff. 72-77 b. Mildmay was one of the English commissioners sent to Paris in 1750 to settle the Acadian question. His colleague was Gov. Shirley of Massachusetts. The writer of the letter is not certainly known, but he had been for a long time a resident of the southern part of the island, f. 73.

¹² "The great Prices of our Commodities, with Respect of the other Colonies about us, tempt the Irish, Northern, and other Traders, to carry off our Gold and light Silver to those Colonies, where they can buy the same Commodities, at a cheaper Rate, with our Money. . . . This Condition of our Affairs has been the Cause of carrying away our Silver, while we had any, it being the most beneficial Part of our Currency for most Purposes." *Caribbeana*, I. 135 (Barbadoes). For Barbadoes the annual drain of specie was estimated at £85,000 stg.; *Present State of the British Sugar Colonies Considered*, p. 23. For Jamaica at £64,977 stg. "An Inquiry into the Causes of the Present Scarcity of Money", pp. 21-22 (Brit. Mus., Add. MSS. 30163), a work that contains an exceptionally good statement of the influence of the Northern trade upon the financial situation in the island. Robertson discusses the question for the Leeward Islands but does not give figures.

¹³ "This trade tends to the Encrease and Improvement of the Foreign Sugar Colonies and the decrease of our own and is at present very prejudicial to His Majesty's Revenue; for without this Trade, the Sugar, Rum, and Molasses consumed in the Northern Colonies would be Exported from the English Sugar Colonies and pay His Majesty not only a duty of 4½ per cent. but also the Enumerated Duty as we call it, which is a duty of 18 pence per hundred paid the King for all Sugars exported to our Colonies. The Quantity of Sugars imported to our Colonies from the French and Dutch is so great that they send a great deal of it to England as the Produce of our Colonies. By which means His Majesty is not only defrauded of the Double Duty, but also of the Enumerated Duty supposed to have been paid upon this first Exportation from the Colony where they were made." Letter from W. Gordon to the Board of Trade, August 17, 1720, C. O. 5: 867, W. 110.

This trade in all its manifold aspects is discussed at length by the pamphleteers of the period and a list of such writings will be given in a later note. One of the fairest and least contentious of the writers is Robertson, a planter of Nevis, who had resided on that island since 1706, and, in the years from

The growth of this trade from 1713¹⁴ to 1730 became so rapid as to alarm the British merchants and planters, particularly in Barbadoes, the centre of resistance to the French encroachment. The attention of the home authorities was called to the calamitous condition of the planters, and in 1724 the Privy Council ordered the Board of Trade to prepare a full state of the sugar and tobacco trades.¹⁵ Four years later it instructed the same body to consider "what Laws it may be reasonable to pass in the Severall Plantations for restraining his Majesty's Subjects from Importing into the British Plantations such products of the French Plantations as may interfere with the British Trade".¹⁶ In the meantime the Barbadians had begun a determined campaign of their own. They formed an organization, raised funds which they transmitted to London,¹⁷ and despatched representatives to act there in conjunction with the agents of the colony. They invited the planters of the Leeward Islands to join in the movement, offering to meet all expenses. In 1730 and 1731 the matter was brought to the immediate attention of the Privy Council in a series of petitions from the "Planters, Traders, and other Inhabitants" of Barbadoes and the "several Merchant Planters and others interested in and trading to His

1727 to 1733, wrote a series of letters to the Bishop of London, a member of Parliament, and a gentleman of London, that were printed. The titles are *A Letter to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of London* (1730), with *A Short Essay concerning the Conversion of the Negro-Slaves in our Sugar Colonies* (written in June, 1727), *A Detection* (already cited), *A Supplement to the Detection* (already cited), *An Enquiry* (already cited), and *A Short Account of the Hurricane* (1733), which contains (pp. 26-28) a statement of the conditions under which the pamphlets were written. These pamphlets present an admirable defense of the case of the sugar planters, with special reference to the Leeward Islands.

In *A Short View of the Smuggling Trade carried on by the British Northern Colonies in Violation of the Acts of Navigation and several other Acts of Parliament* may be found a characteristic survey of the general situation, with sections on "Some of the Ill Consequences arising from this Trade to Great Britain" (p. 2), "Some of the Ill Consequences arising from this Trade to the Sugar Colonies" (pp. 2-3), and "Benefits which Great Britain may derive to herself and her Sugar Colonies by putting an Effectual Stop to this Trade" (pp. 3-4). The only copy of this paper that I have seen is in the British Museum. It is undated.

¹⁴ Robertson traces the French encouragement of the trade to the years immediately following the treaty of Utrecht. *A Supplement*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁵ The Board of Trade, in reply to this order, sent in an elaborate report dated July 24, 1724, *Acts of the Privy Council, Col.*, vol. III., § 62. A copy of the complete report may be found in C. O. 5:389, 28, pp. 175-219.

¹⁶ *Acts of the Privy Council, Col.*, III. 193.

¹⁷ "I believe the Barbads people would give or expend at le[a]st £2000 sterlg to obtain their end." Partridge to Gov. Jencks of Rhode Island, August 23, 1731, Kimball, *Correspondence of the Colonial Governors of Rhode Island*, I. 20.

Majesty's Sugar Colonies in America". At the same time agents and representatives of the northern British colonies appeared to defend their side of the case. The borough authorities of Liverpool upheld the cause of the Sugar Colonies, while the merchants of Dublin naturally took the part of the Northern Colonies. Exasperated by frequent postponements of the hearing before the Privy Council, and convinced that the Sugar Colonies were "engaged in a mortal Combat with those of Foreign Nations" and that no "quack-ing and palliative Medicines" would suffice, the Barbadians and their allies finally decided to seek directly the aid of the British Parliament.¹⁸ On March 30, 1731, they withdrew their petition to the king, announcing that they had made application to Parliament for relief "in the Matters complained of in their said Petitions".¹⁹ In so doing they expressed not only their discontent with the procedure of the Privy Council, but also their agreement with a rapidly growing conviction in England and the colonies that an act of Parliament was a more "certain and effectual" means of gaining relief in matters colonial and commercial than was an order in Council,²⁰ which could do nothing more than authorize the passing of remedial legislation by the colonies themselves.

The appeal to Parliament was at first unsuccessful. The government, with manifest reluctance and a lively realization of the issues involved, brought the matter before the House of Commons in the form of a bill for securing and encouraging the trade of the British West Indies. This bill was planned as a blow at the French sugar trade, and was designed to check and turn back if possible the French invasion of the British colonial market. It declared that no sugar, rum, or molasses of the plantations of foreign nations should be imported into Great Britain or Ireland or any of the king's dominions in America under penalty of forfeiture; and that no horses or lumber should be carried to the foreign sugar colonies. As a prohibitive measure, this bill was a true mercantilist device,

¹⁸ *Caribbeana*, I. 83, 85, 195. "Nothing can help our desperate Case, but a thorough Regulation of the whole Habit. The British Parliament must be our Physician." *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136. Robertson takes the same position when he approves of the statement, "The Disease of the British Sugar Colonies will gangrene by a Palliative Cure." *A Supplement*, p. 75.

¹⁹ *Acts of the Privy Council, Col.*, vol. III., § 222.

²⁰ For a situation that was not dissimilar, see my article on "The Connecticut Intestacy Law" in *Select Essays in Anglo-American Legal History*, I. 456-458, especially p. 458, note 2. Even the committee of the whole Council, reporting in 1725 on the salary question in Massachusetts, acknowledged the failure of the royal authority, as expressed in the governors' instructions, and advised the king "to order this whole Matter to be laid before the Parliament of Great Britain". *Acts of the Privy Council, Col.*, III. 111.

for though the merchants and planters were ready to present a dozen minor remedies for the relief of the sugar trade, they were all agreed that complete prohibition was the only certain method of attaining the desired end. On the plea of their own necessity and the welfare of the mother-country they sought to control by means of parliamentary legislation a course of trade that was the natural and inevitable outcome of the agricultural and commercial life of the northern British colonies.

The struggle that followed was exciting. The supporters of the bill declared that the British sugar islands were in a languishing condition, their export of sugar diminished, their duties high, their plantations understocked, their planters poor, their soil worn out, and their fortifications destroyed.²¹ They acknowledged that the French islands contained fresher sugar land than the British, were more fruitful, better inhabited, paid less duties, and had greater encouragement from the home country.²² But, they maintained, the British islands were a source of great profit to England and must be protected, else they would steadily deteriorate and might eventually pass into the hands of the French themselves. For, as Robertson expressed it, "this Contest is not as some weak People imagine and some selfish People would have us all to think, a Contest between the British Southern and Northern Colonies, but between Great Britain and France, which of the two shall be Mistress of the Foreign Sugar Trade." "We are contending", he continued, "with the united Forces of our Nation's Rivals in the Sugar Trade and the Practices of our too selfish Sister Colonies on the Continent."²³

On the other hand, the opponents of the measure asserted that the passage of the bill would ruin the Bread Colonies by diminishing the supply and raising the price of tropical staples desired by the

²¹ A resident of Jamaica, writing about 1750 (the work already noted, entitled "An Inquiry into the Causes of the Present Scarcity of Money"), took a much more hopeful view of the future of that island than others took of the future of Barbadoes and the Leeward Islands. He wished to clear up the "melancholy prospect" of Jamaica that prevailed in England. Nevertheless, on the general situation and the trade of the Northern Colonies he is in accord with the others. The statement in the text is based on opinions common to all the writers of the period and needs no special proof in the way of citations. Among the House of Lords manuscripts are a number of petitions, for and against the bill, some of which were sent up from the Plantation Office. Andrews and Davenport, *Guide*, pp. 204-209, nos. 110, 113, 117, 119, 138.

²² The Jamaican writer mentions among "the many other good Regulations and Encouragements of the French Committee of commerce" the bounty of 9s. 2d. per head allowed by the French king on negroes imported, p. 15.

²³ *A Supplement*, pp. 53-54, 55; *An Enquiry*, p. 20. Cf. Winnington's speech in the House of Commons, *Parliamentary History*, VIII. 993.

New Englanders, and by cutting off the market for the northern staples would glut the demand and lower the price in the West Indies. Should the bill pass, they insisted, the Northern Colonies would certainly suffer in their wealth and prosperity, would become the slaves and bondsmen of the Sugar Colonies, and be reduced to the status of purveyors without independent economic and commercial life.²⁴ Turning on the supporters of the bill, they declared that the present situation was due not so much to the decline of the islands as to the sumptuous and extravagant habits of the planters, and to the fact that owners of plantations resident in England, a number far too large for the good of the colonies, wished to continue the large profits that enabled them to play the part they desired in English social and political life.²⁵ In other words, they

²⁴ Herein lay the crucial point of the dispute. The mercantilists who upheld the cause of the Sugar Islands saw in an independent economic life for the Northern Colonies a menace to the prosperity of the mother-country. In this particular, at least, the views of the disputants were irreconcilable. The danger to England of foreign success in the race for territory or the race for markets is a factor to be reckoned with in our colonial history. Just as the relations with Spain to 1660 and with Holland to 1675 affected colonial affairs of the seventeenth century, so the rivalry with France to 1763 influenced the colonial policy of the Board of Trade and determined many of the measures introduced into Parliament that concerned the colonies in the first half of the eighteenth century even, including the bills designed to bring the proprietary and corporate colonies immediately under the authority of the crown. The traditional view of colonial history cannot but err in its estimate of British purpose when it ignores the larger issues upon which British policy rested. Fears of French commercial supremacy governed very materially the attitude of British statesmen, officials, legislators, and merchants toward matters colonial during the years from 1700 to 1750, and a knowledge of this fact clears up many things hitherto overlooked or inadequately explained.

²⁵ That many of the British West Indian planters were extravagant in their dress and mode of living seems amply attested, but how far the luxurious life of individual planters was responsible for the existing situation is not so clear. The Jamaican ("An Inquiry into the Causes of the Present Scarcity of Money") has much to say on this point. He speaks of "our extravagances, which consist mostly of costly liquors of foreign growth and French fineries", p. 51, and he estimates that £50,000 was annually expended in luxury, which was "a great drain on the wealth of the island", pp. 92-93.

More important was the question of absentee-planters. This question was deemed so vital to the welfare of the colonies that from 1730 to 1764 acts were passed, notably in Jamaica, but also in Antigua and St. Christopher, imposing a double tax on absentees. The Board of Trade recommended that these acts be disallowed as unjust and improper. *Acts of the Privy Council, Col.*, vol. III., § 557, p. 739, vol. IV., § 48, vol. VI., §§ 457, 461, 465, 471, 473, 588. In the Jamaican's paper appears the following item, "To so much allowed to be drained off the country by absentees, for Lodgements and for the Education of the Youth in Engd. 200,000", pp. 95-96. A visitor to Antigua in 1774 speaks of the numbers of absentees "that leave this little paradise and throw away vast sums of money in London, where they are either entirely overlooked, or ridiculed for an extravagance which after all does not raise them to a level with hundreds

said, the British West Indian sugar planters asked to be favored at the expense of the remainder of the colonial world;²⁶ and if they were so favored then England would lose the Bread Colonies as a vent for her manufactures, because the latter would have no money wherewith to buy English goods.

To the last group of arguments the mercantilists replied with equal spirit. They declared that the charges of extravagance and luxury, made by Joshua Gee, the agents of the Northern Colonies, and the pamphleteers, were based on ignorance of the actual balance sheets of the sugar plantations, and that in fact the bulk of the sugar planters were so far from being opulent that not a few of them were in debt in England and the greater part of the plantations considerably understocked in "hands" as well as other neces-

sary around them. Antigua has more proprietors, however, than any of the other islands; St. Christophers, they tell me, is almost abandoned to overseers and managers, owing to the amazing fortunes that belong to individuals, who almost all reside in England." Brit. Mus., Egerton 2423, pp. 111-112. This statement regarding St. Christopher is confirmed by a letter of April 5, 1780, in which it is said that "in Antigua, being poorer than St. Kitts, most of the landed proprietors live on the island because they cannot afford to live in England, whereas at St. Kitts, there are mostly managers". Oliver, *History of Antigua*, I. cxxiv. The practice was a very old one and dates back to the beginning of West Indian history. Newton, *Colonising Activities of the English Puritans*, p. 159. Robertson speaks of "those who have estates in the Leeward Islands and live in England themselves (of which there are several in and about London)", and he notes a member of the Board of Trade who "in right of his Lady, became owner of a plantation in the island of Nevis", *A Detection*, p. 50. Abraham Redwood, of Newport, Rhode Island, who founded the Redwood Library there and gave 100 Spanish milled dollars to the poor of the town, had a plantation in Antigua. *Commerce of Rhode Island* (Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., seventh series), IX. 1-64; Oliver, *History of Antigua*, III. 43-46.

²⁶ That self-interest underlay the arguments of the Barbadians and Leeward Islanders is manifest and not surprising. A similar self-interest underlay the attitude of the Northern Colonies toward the Navigation Acts as a whole. The same conflict of interests may be seen in the objections raised by the British West India merchants to the grant of Tobago in 1728 to the Duke of Montagu, on the ground that new plantations tended to reduce the price of sugar (*Acts of the Privy Council, Col.*, VI. 197), a curious objection in view of the frequent arguments at this time in favor of extending the area of British sugar planting in the West Indies (Robertson, *A Supplement*, pp. 60-61, 69-70). The same conflict may be seen in the attempt of Barbadian planters to stop the New England trade to Surinam in 1714, because they deemed it detrimental to the British sugar plantations and to the trade and navigation of the kingdom (*Acts of the Privy Council, Col.*, vol. II., § 1200). Thomas Banister of Boston showed clearly the value of the Surinam trade to New England; and so evident was the injustice of stopping it, that Parliament refused to interfere (*New York Col. Docs.*, V. 597; Letter of W. Gordon, C. O. 5: 867, W 110; *A Short Essay on the Principal Branches of the Trade of New England, with the Difficulties they labour under and some Methods of Improvement*, by T[homas] B[anister] (London, 1715), pp. 12-13. The original draft of this essay, which is in the form of a letter to the Board of Trade, is in C. O. 5: 866, V 91.

saries for carrying on the sugar manufacture.²⁷ They insisted that the Northern Colonies were in fact what the tropical colonies were falsely said to be, very rich, and that the conduct of the latter in "dissembling what they are has perhaps turned as much to their private advantage, as our folly in boasting of what we never were, has injured both us and our Mother Nation". As to the Northern Colonies obtaining their supply of hard money by this trade, the planters denied the assertion with emphasis, claiming that the money obtained from the British islands was laid out in the purchase of commodities at the French islands, and that not one penny of it was carried back to New England, New York, or Philadelphia, or remitted to England. And as to favoring one part of the colonial world more than another, the bill was designed to benefit the commerce of Great Britain and to advance the welfare of the colonies that were of most importance to her, and no one could deny that in this respect the sugar trade and the Sugar Colonies were deserving of greater attention than the provision trade and the Bread Colonies.²⁸

²⁷ The only British colony in the West Indies that was able to obtain a sufficient stock of good slaves was Barbadoes. The Leeward Islands and Jamaica were always understocked, and even in Barbadoes it was claimed that the best negroes went to the French and Spanish plantations, partly because the French controlled the richest areas of supply and partly because the French and Spanish were able to offer better prices on account of the steadily increasing demand. Furthermore it was reported that the soil in Hispaniola was so rich that the planters could do more with one slave than could be done with four at Jamaica (*Commons Journal*, XXI. 687). On the other hand, Knight said that the negroes in Hispaniola had "very little affection to their Masters, by reason of their severity and the hard labour they put them to" (Brit. Mus., Add. MSS. 32695, f. 310). The letter to Mildmay, already cited, devotes considerable space to the negro trade of Hispaniola (*ibid.*, 32828, ff. 74b-76), and Robertson in his *Letter to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of London* treats of the understocking of the British sugar plantations.

²⁸ The literature of this discussion, both in print and in manuscript, is very extensive, but the arguments are often far from convincing. "In each case", to quote a comment made on trade quarrels in England at an earlier date, "both parties had an interest in representing their own trade as languishing through the prosperity of their opponents, while the opponents retorted that they themselves were not half so prosperous as was made out." *Social England*, IV. 122. The following list is representative but not exhaustive. *The Case of the Provinces of the Massachusetts Bay and New Hampshire and the Colonies of Rhode Island with Providence Plantations, and Connecticut in New England, and the Province of New Jersey, with respect to the Bill now depending in the Honourable House of Commons, intituled a Bill for the better securing and encouraging the Trade of His Majesty's Sugar Colonies in America* (1731); *The Case of the British Northern Colonies* (1731); *Observations on the Case of the British Northern Colonies* (1731); "A Letter on the Bill now depending in Parliament", in *The Free Briton*, April 15, 1731; a letter to *The Daily Post Boy*, March 6, 1731; *The Importance of the British Sugar Plantations in America*

The bill of 1731, though passed by the House of Commons and debated in the House of Lords, was finally dropped altogether.²⁹ This event is a landmark in the history of the relations not only between England and France, but also between England and her continental colonies in America. It marked the first important failure of that phase of the mercantilist policy which rated the colonies furnishing tropical products more highly than those taking off manufactured articles,³⁰ and it began the tilting of the balance in favor of the Bread Colonies, a movement slow in its consummation, and not completed till 1763 when Guadeloupe was returned to France and Canada retained. It marked the first failure of a de-

to this Kingdom, with the State of their Trade and Methods for Improving it (1731); *A Short Answer* (to the same), in a *Letter to a Noble Peer* (1731); *The Present State of the British Sugar Islands Considered, in a Letter from a Gentleman of Barbadoes to his Friend in London* (1731); *The British Empire in America Considered*, in a second letter from the same (1732); *The Controversy between the Northern Colonies and the Sugar Islands respectively Considered* (1732?); *Arguments against the Bill for the better securing and encouraging the Trade of His Majesty's Sugar Colonies in America* (unsigned and undated, but either 1731 or 1732); and the various writings of Robertson, already cited. All of these pamphlets were written to uphold or oppose the bills of 1731 and 1733, but later letters and papers, issued during the continuance of the controversy, 1733-1763, repeat many of the same arguments. See also the representations of the Board of Trade to Parliament, February 1, 1733 (printed, manuscript copy in C. O. 5: 5, ff. 1-24), January 23, 1734 (printed, manuscript copy in C. O. 324: 12, pp. 7-72), and January 14, 1735 (printed, manuscript copies in C. O. 5: 5, ff. 102-123, and 324: 12, pp. 79-120). For the last two, see Andrews and Davenport, *Guide*, p. 208. An excellent résumé of the arguments is given in Salmon, *Modern History*, III. 624-632 (1739).

²⁹ The petition from the Sugar Colonies was discussed in Parliament and evidence taken, February 23, 1731 (*Commons Journal*, XXI. 641, 685-689; *Parliamentary History*, VIII. 856-857). The bill was debated January 28, 1732 (*Commons Journal*, XXI. 782; *Parl. Hist.*, VIII. 918-921); and February 23 (*Commons Journal*, XXI. 811; *Parl. Hist.*, VIII. 992-1002), and went to committee in March. It was passed March 15, by a vote of 110 to 37 (*Commons Journal*, XXI. 849), and carried to the Lords the next day (*Lords Journal*, XXIV. 52). There it went to the select committee on the 17th, and on the 21st the agents of the colonies were given a hearing (pp. 54, 58-59). It reached the committee stage on the same day, and representations, returns, and statistics were called for (pp. 59, 60, 64, 67-68). On March 31 it passed the second reading (p. 77). More information was required, and on April 25 petitions were received (Andrews and Davenport, *Guide*, pp. 204-205), and agents and others heard (*Lords Journal*, XXIV. 97-98). Further consideration was postponed first till May 3 and then for a month, but when the time came Parliament had been prorogued.

³⁰ The advantages of the Northern Colonies as a source of supply, a vent for manufactures, and a territory capable of indefinite development were all rated of no profit to Great Britain, and far less deserving of consideration than the one asset of the sugar trade. The mercantilist deemed a tract of land greater than could be "either cultivated or defended" a menace, not an advantage.

liberate act of commercial warfare, which would certainly have been passed against France and other foreign nations in the West Indies, had not mercantilism already lost something of its power and had not the Bread Colonies already attained such strength that their welfare could not be ignored. The bill of 1731 was upheld not only by the governor, agents, and merchants of Barbadoes, and by the sugar planters resident in London and the outports, but also by the Board of Trade, the auditor general of the plantation revenues,³¹ and a large majority of the members of the House of Commons. Despite the failure of the bill to pass the House of Lords, the debates and hearings in committee show that the mercantilist doctrines were still uppermost in England.

In 1733 the planters returned to the attack and this time they were successful. The new measure, endorsed by a special representation sent from the Board of Trade to the House of Commons, was accepted by the House of Lords, because it omitted the objectionable features of the first bill, and finally became a law.³² Thus, after a discussion lasting not less than ten years, the famous Molasses Act of 1733 came into existence. But it was, from the standpoint of the true mercantilist, an emasculated measure, in that it conceded the very principle which the bill of 1731 had denied, the right of traffic between the British Bread Colonies and the foreign Sugar Colonies. Sugar, rum, and molasses, under heavy duties, might be imported into the northern continental colonies, and horses and lumber might be exported without restraint into the French, Dutch, and Danish West Indies. It is true that the duties imposed were judged to be tantamount to a prohibition, so that even in its modified form the measure was a blow aimed at the commercial encroachments of the French, but the act did allow the Northern Col-

³¹ The auditor, Horatio Walpole, seconded the motion to commit the bill, February 23, 1732 (*Parl. Hist.*, VIII. 995). He also introduced the bill of 1733 (*Commons Journal*, XXII. 71), made a speech, and offered an amendment (*Parl. Hist.*, VIII. 1197).

³² Parliament met in new session, January 16, 1733. The question was debated February 21 (*Commons Journal*, XXII. 54; *Parl. Hist.*, VIII. 1195-1199), and reported favorably by committee, February 22 (*Commons Journal*, XXII. 55-56). The bill was brought in March 5, was debated (*Commons Journal*, XXII. 79; *Parl. Hist.*, VIII. 1261), and passed the second reading (*Commons Journal*, XXII. 83). On March 21 it passed the House of Commons (p. 99) and was sent to the Lords April 3 (*Lords Journal*, XXIV. 223). There it was debated April 12 (p. 231) and April 23 (p. 242), and passed the second reading April 23 (p. 243). It then went to the committee of the whole House (p. 244), from which it was reported without amendment, May 1 (p. 252). It was passed, May 4, referred back to the House of Commons, May 7, and received the royal consent, May 17. The law was passed for five years only, but was renewed by 11 George II., c. 18; 19 George II., c. 23; 26 George II., c. 32; 29 George II., c. 26; 31 George II., c. 36; and 1 George III., c. 9, till 1763.

onies to export all but the enumerated commodities to the foreign West Indies, thus favoring these colonies as far as possible. At best it was but a half-way measure, unsatisfactory to the mercantilists, because it was not prohibitory, and burdensome to the Northern Colonies, because it restrained, or tried to restrain, their freedom of commercial intercourse. Its promoters might have realized that liberty of export without a direct importation in return would not benefit the Northern Colonies, and that if right of export were allowed by law, a direct import would be secured by evasion.³³ In almost every particular the Molasses Act proved a failure. It probably did nothing to injure the prosperity of the French colonies, if we are to believe John Bennett's account of the situation in 1736.³⁴ It profited little to the advantage of Great Britain, because it did not materially increase the customs revenue and fell short of meeting the expense of collecting the duties imposed.³⁵ It failed to answer the needs and expectations of the British West Indian planters because it did not go far enough. And, finally, it checked but slightly the export of French sugars to the northern British colonies because it was consistently evaded from the first.³⁶

The sequel demonstrates the truth of these conclusions. The

³³ Partridge, the agent of Rhode Island, wrote to Deputy Governor Wanton, "In the present Bill they have left out the Restriction of sending Horses and Lumber to the Foreign Plantations but we think in a Manner this is as bad as the old Bill for to what Purpose will it be to have Liberty to send away our Commodities if we cannot have Returns for them?" Kimball, *Correspondence*, I. 23-24.

³⁴ See John Bennett's pamphlet, below note 37.

³⁵ The Jamaican writing in 1750 (Brit. Mus., Add. MSS. 30163) estimated the returns from the eighteen pence plantation duty at only £675 a year from Jamaica, a relatively insignificant sum. In 1754 the statement was made that the duty on all sugars from the British West Indies to the Northern Colonies came to no more than £1500 a year, showing an export of only 1400 hhds. of British sugar. So small an amount made it clear that a great deal of French and Dutch sugar was used by the Northern Colonies. Brit. Mus., Add. MSS. 34729, f. 355. In 1765 the Treasury informed the Privy Council that the revenue arising from the "Duties of Customs imposed on your Majestys Subjects in America and the West Indies . . . is very small and inconsiderable, having in no degree increased with the Commerce of those Countries, and is not yet sufficient to defray a fourth Part of the Expence necessary for collecting it." *Acts of the Privy Council, Col.*, IV. 569.

³⁶ "I am sorry to observe that the Duties imposed thereby on Foreign Rum and Molasses are evaded, and the Design of that well intended Law totally eluded; so that instead of being beneficial, it is like to prove in some Respects fatal to these Colonies and their Trade. 'Tis notorious that most of the Northern Traders who come hither, and to the Leeward Islands, do now sell their Cargoes, or such Part thereof, as is most in Demand, for ready Money. This they carry off, and rendezvouze sometimes 40 Sail at a Time at St. Eustatia, a Dutch Settlement in the Center of the Leeward and Virgin-Islands, where great Quantities of the Commodities I am speaking of, are constantly lodged for Sale, which they purchase to load their Vessels, without either Fear or Restraint,

effects of the act were slight. Conditions after 1733 were but little changed from what they had been before. The West Indian planters were not satisfied with the terms and demanded further concessions. They sent in petitions to the Board of Trade, wrote pamphlets,³⁷ encouraged lobbying by the colonial agents, and made the Jamaica Coffee House, Cornhill, the centre of an active propaganda. They complained forcibly of the incumbrances and charges still left upon the West Indian trade, comparing their own decline to the prosperity of the French islands and ascribing it to many causes. Chief among these were the enumeration of sugar³⁸ and

whereby we do not only lose the Sale of those Species, but are, at the same Time, drained of our Cash." Letter dated from Barbadoes, March 2, 1735, *Caribbeana*, II. 129.

"We are disappointed of the good Effect expected from the Act for better securing, and encouraging the Trade of His Majestys Sugar Colonies in America, by the Northern Traders, who still carry it on." By the same writer, May 22, 1736. *Ibid.*, pp. 161.

The Jamaican writing in 1750 speaks of the "Norward Traders smuggling with the French" as "proved by matters of Fact strongly attested", *Brit. Mus., Add. MSS.* 30163, p. 23; and see below, note 50, for the action of the traders in 1752.

³⁷ The most important pamphlets of this period are by John Ashley, a planter of Barbadoes, entitled *The Sugar Trade with the Incumbrances laid open* (1734) and *Some Observations on a direct Exportation of Sugar from the British Islands, with Answers to Mr. Torriano's Objections* (1735). The "Mr. Torriano" referred to was Nathaniel Torriano, a merchant of London, who had sent a long letter, dated August 8, 1724, in which he presented arguments against relieving the Sugar Colonies of the obligation to send their sugars to England. Later, Ashley published another pamphlet entitled *Memoirs and Considerations on the Trade and Revenue of the British Colonies in America* (1740). One should consult also John Bennett, *Four Letters concerning the flourishing Condition, large Export, and prodigious Increase of the French Sugar Colonies; the Poverty, Weakness, and Decay of the British Sugar Colonies, and their vast Importance to the Trade, Navigation, Wealth, and Power of this Nation* (1736).

³⁸ Gee pointed out in 1721 the burden of the enumeration as follows: "If a merchant sends out a ship from London with a cargo to the Sugar Islands to barter against Sugar, he brings this sugar to London, the charges of freight, landing, housing, wastage, etc., may amount to 9 s. per hundred; if he ship it off to Spain or the Straits, the freight, wastage, etc., may amount to 4 s. and 6 d. per hundred more. But if he can carry it directly from the Sugar Islands to Spain or the Straits, it will scarcely exceed 6 s. per hundred. If the sugar dont sell for above 20 s. per hundred, the merchant loses by this round-about voyage nearly forty per cent." Memorial to the Board of Trade, October 27, 1721, *C. O.* 323: 8, L 24. Ashley computed the difference at thirty per cent. and Robertson does the same, *A Supplement*, p. 16; *An Enquiry*, p. 17. Dr. Pitman calls my attention to the existence in London of a Sugar Trust, the United Company of Grocers and Sugar Bakers, which upheld enumeration as placing the planters more or less at its mercy. Petitions against enumeration were presented to the House of Commons on March 31, 1735 (*Commons Journal*, XXII. 439), and the subject was debated at considerable length. Calls were made for statistical returns and other evidence, including Torriano's letter of 1724 (pp. 444, 449-450, 451, 457, 488, 549-550, 590, 618), but the bill itself was not presented until 1739. See note 40.

the high duties in England upon all tropical staples, sugar, cocoa, coffee, and ginger. They declared with great justice that Great Britain's policy was illiberal and her regulation of trade selfish as compared with that of the French government, which by the decrees of 1726 and 1727 allowed free export to Spain and the Straits. They warned the British authorities that just as France already controlled the indigo trade, so would her merchants soon monopolize other tropical staples, if free export were not permitted and the duties lowered. Other causes were assigned for the prevailing depression, but these two were deemed by all the *fons et origo mali*.

The matter came up in Parliament in 1739. The West Indian planters recommended the passage of a bill allowing general and free exportation, reductions of duty and excise, remission of the four and a half per cent., direct trade with Ireland, and further relief in the re-exporting of refined sugar. But it was manifest to all that no bill could pass embodying such terms as these. The Board of Trade had already recommended a limited freedom of trade³⁹ and the House of Commons was ready to make a limited concession. During the course of the debate there was a call for all kinds of information bearing on the subject. The Treasury, the Commissioners of Customs, the Board of Trade, and the Victualling Board were ordered to furnish statistics. Protests were heard and petitions read from sugar refiners, merchants, ship-owners, shipwrights, ship-chandlers, and others, not only of London but also of Liverpool, Whitehaven, and other ports and manufacturing centres, against free exportation, consequently the terms of the bill were modified and only a restricted freedom granted.⁴⁰ The bill as finally

³⁹ "With respect to the charges of our Navigation, it would be impossible to give our Traders any relief in this particular, without breaking thro' some established customs, and making great alterations in several laws, by which many general charges have been imposed upon shipping, for the repairs of Peers and Lighthouses; but they have long been desirous of carrying their sugars directly to all the European markets, to the southward of Cape Finisterre; and we would humbly submit it to your Lordships, whether such a Liberty might not be granted under proper Restriction." *Representation from the Board of Trade to the House of Lords*, January 14, 1735, p. 14. For Cape Finisterre as marking the southern boundary of the British Seas, see Fuller, *The Sovereignty of the Sea*, pp. 502, 510, 515, 519, 521.

⁴⁰ *Commons Journal*, XXIII. 284, 292, 297, 298, 318, 329, 338-339, 340, 343, 344, 349, 351, 361, 365-366, 368, 370, 372-373; amended by the Lords, p. 378. For statistics collected by the Treasury, see Andrews, *Guide*, II. 248-249. For the various reports and petitions, Andrews and Davenport, *Guide*, pp. 211-212. It is worthy of note that in the course of the debate one of the French decrees of 1726 was read from Gee's *The Trade and Navigation of Great Britain Considered*, and it is probable that Gee's opinions on the general subject, as stated in that work (pp. 43-53), were given due weight.

passed⁴¹ permitted West Indian planters to send their sugar, but sugar only, to foreign ports south of Cape Finisterre, in ships built in and sailing from Great Britain and navigated according to law. As by this bill sugar was placed in the same class with rice, we have here another instance of the gradual breaking down of the strict mercantilist policy in favor of the Northern Colonies. But the measure as a whole was so clogged with restrictions as to be of little benefit to the sugar planters.⁴² It excluded colonial-built ships, which could always carry more cheaply than those of England; it imposed a burdensome licensing system; it required that a ship discharging her lading south of Cape Finisterre should return by way of England, under the terms of the act of 1663; and it admitted no direct trade with Ireland. The chief grievance, however, was the confining of the foreign market to the least desirable parts of the European world. The best sugar markets were in the north, not in the south where the French and Portuguese had control of the trade. The benefits of the law were slight.⁴³ The

⁴¹ 12 George II., c. 30.

⁴² "There has lately been past an Act in the Thirteenth of the present King, entitled An Act for granting a Liberty to carry Sugars, . . . But the Legislature thought it necessary to clog it with such Restrictions that we do not find it is like to prove of any great Benefit to the Sugar-Colonies; and indeed many of the Merchants were at first clear of Opinion that it would not, which, however, the Planters on the other Hand were ready to impute to Views of Self-Interest, in respect to Commissions." *Caribbeana*, II. 62, note. That the Northern Colonies deemed it detrimental to their interests also may be inferred from the comment of Gov. Wanton of Rhode Island in writing to Gov. Belcher of Massachusetts. "I am desired by our General Assembly to acquaint Your Excelcy That a Vote is pass'd directing our Agent in Conjunction with the others strenuously to oppose at the next Session of Parliament the new additional Act relating to the Sugar Colonies in the W. Indies, which if pass'd will prove extreamly prejudicial and hurtful to the Trade of all the Northern Colonies, and therefore desire That Your Excelcy will please to move it to Your Genl Court That proper Instructions might be given for that purpose." November 12, 1739. Kimball, *Correspondence*, I. 123. An identical letter was sent to the governor of Connecticut, *Talcott Papers* (Conn. Hist. Soc. Coll.), V. 186.

⁴³ Though the preamble to the act of 1742 declared that the act of 1739 had proved "very beneficial to the colonies", the evidence in the case does not bear out this statement. Dr. Pitman says that it resulted in very little actual trade in sugar directly to the Continent, though it did raise prices in England and enhanced somewhat the power and influence of the West Indian planters residing there. Proof of this may be found in the debates on the proposed increase of the sugar duty in 1744, when a bill to that effect was defeated in Parliament (*Parl. Hist.*, XIII. 640-641, 652-655). Arguments against this proposed duty, which continued imminent even after defeat, can be found in *The State of the Sugar Trade* (1747), which shows "the dangerous consequences that must attend any additional duty thereon", and asserts that the planters gained nothing from the rise of prices. Dr. Pitman shows that the licenses required by the act of 1739 were a serious obstacle and were little utilized, only forty-eight being taken out from 1739 to 1753, and of these but five were used, by Jamaica

French competition appeared to increase unchecked, and the restrictions upon the sugar trade seemed as burdensome as before. During the decade that followed but two concessions were made by the British Parliament to the continued demands of the Sugar Islands. In 1742 colonial-built ships were admitted to the privileges of the act of 1739,⁴⁴ and in 1748, the drawback on sugar, refined in Great Britain and exported to the Continent, was increased,⁴⁵ a measure manifestly passed quite as much in the interest of the sugar refiners as of the sugar planters. England persistently refused to lower her duties or to ameliorate in any way the burden of the four and a half per cent., though the colonists for a century had urged her to do so,⁴⁶ beginning their organized attack as early as 1732 upon the coffee duty and continuing to the end of the period.⁴⁷ Decker once said, "'Tis our own covetous folly that can undo us", and there is much in England's commercial policy of the eighteenth century to demonstrate the truth of this remark.

The situation in 1750 was to the mercantilists no better than it had been in 1731. The latter were ready to prove that the British traders in North America had for years carried on a large and extensive trade not only with the foreign colonies in America but with the French and Dutch in Europe directly; that they imported vast quantities of sugar, rum, and molasses yearly from the French and Dutch sugar colonies into the northern British colonies in direct violation of the Molasses Act, and had carried this trade to such a height as to purchase vessels destined for this trade only, of which there were three hundred employed annually, and to settle correspondents and factors in the French islands to facilitate this commerce; that they carried on this trade with and for the benefit of France, to the injury of the British Sugar Colonies, draining them

and Barbadoes planters only. The general situation at this time is summed up in *The Present State of the British and French Trade to Africa and America considered and compared, with some Propositions in favour of the Trade of Great Britain* (1745), and in *A Letter to a Member of Parliament concerning the Importance of our Sugar Colonies to Great Britain, by a Gentleman who resided in America* (1745). The titles of other pamphlets of this period are given in the first part of this paper, note 44.

⁴⁴ 15 George II. c. 35, § 5.

⁴⁵ 21 George II. c. 2, § 7. See a paper in Public Record Office, Treasury 1, 331.

⁴⁶ Wood wrote in 1718, "It is certain that the high duties are such a weight upon the Industry of our Merchants, that it hinders us from Enlarging our Trade to the utmost it might otherwise be capable of. Therefore it may deserve Consideration, whether if parts of the customs were taken off, of some sorts of imported Goods, and of all our Manufactures exported, it might not be very beneficial to the Nation." *Survey of Trade*, p. 219.

⁴⁷ *Commons Journal*, XXI. 829, 845-846, 855, 866, 869, 911.

of their money which was spent in the foreign colonies for tropical products, or for European and East Indian commodities that should have been obtained only through English ports; and lastly, that they went so far as to lend themselves to the corrupting influence of the foreign planters and to become instruments for introducing foreign sugars, under the denomination and disguise of British, into Great Britain itself.⁴⁸ In 1750 the assembly of Jamaica sent a remonstrance to England against this trade. In February, 1752, a committee of eight, representing a group of merchant planters in England, appeared before the Board of Trade and at the same time sent a petition to the Treasury, asserting that there were then under seizure by the custom house officers at the port of Bristol sugars entered as British from New York, that were really and bona fide from the French colonies. These men begged that a bill be presented in Parliament for the purpose of prohibiting entirely this traffic, thus reverting to the purpose of the measure defeated twenty years before.⁴⁹ But the effort failed. The Privy Council, instead of advising a resort to Parliament for a repeal of the Molasses Act and the reconsideration of the defeated measure of 1731, contented itself with writing a circular letter to all the governors of the Sugar Colonies directing them "to use their best endeavours to procure the passage of [colonial laws] containing regulations for preventing this illicit and clandestine traffic".⁵⁰ It was an innocuous and nerveless device for evading responsibility, and

⁴⁸ Brit. Mus., Add. MSS. 33030, ff. 401-402, "State of an Illegal and Clandestine Trade carried on by the British Northern Colonies in America". Similar statements are made in the Jamaican's account, "An Inquiry into the Causes of the Present Scarcity of Money", Brit. Mus., Add. MSS. 30163, ff. 23-24. The sending of French sugars for British was complained of as early as 1720. See above, note 13.

⁴⁹ Brit. Mus., Add. MSS. 34729, f. 350. A draft of the bill, which was designed to take effect in 1755, is given on ff. 352-353, and is followed by reasons in its support. The latter attempt to show that the traffic was carried on on a vast scale and that all sugars exported from the Northern Colonies must be French, ff. 354-355. The original petition to the Treasury is in Public Record Office, Treasury 1: 338.

⁵⁰ The relations between the northern British colonies and the French and Dutch West India colonies from 1756 to 1763 do not concern us here. Acting on the authority of the Privy Council's instruction, the assembly of Jamaica passed an act in 1752, re-enacted it in 1756, and passed it again in 1759, prohibiting absolutely the importation of all foreign sugar, rum, and molasses, thus endeavoring to accomplish locally what it had hoped Parliament would do for all the Sugar Colonies. In 1762 the same assembly passed an explanatory act, making such importation a felony and punishable with death without benefit of clergy. It is needless to say that the Board of Trade strongly recommended the disallowance of these acts (C. O. 138: 22, pp. 190-239), but they are important as showing the intense feeling prevailing on this subject in the British West Indies. *Acts of the Privy Council, Col.*, IV. 517-518.

to the West Indian planters it must have seemed but the "palliative cure" of which they had been afraid in 1731.

The act of 1733 and the supplemental measures that followed from 1739 to 1752 were weak and impotent blows at a powerful enemy, whom all the mercantilists characterized as England's greatest rival in the commercial world. Though the pamphleteers greatly exaggerated the menace of French competition, which was actually dangerous only in the sugar trade, their writings were influential at the time and served to spread the belief that France was outfooting England in nearly all parts of the world, was in control of the best markets, and was threatening British commercial leadership in America, the West Indies, Africa, and India. To these men it seemed a crime against England that the French should be aided in their race for commercial supremacy by the northern British colonies, which continued without cessation their practice of importing sugar, rum, and molasses from the foreign colonies and of exporting these foreign staples to England as if they were British products. It was inevitable that continued advance on the part of the French, either real or apparent, should lead to arms, just as a similar advance on the part of the Dutch had ended in war a century before, and that something stronger than legislative enactments should be resorted to, in order to break the hold that France, to all appearances, was gaining on the territory and trade of the western world. The commercial conflict, which had known no truce in the years from 1700 to 1750, merged almost imperceptibly, but none the less certainly, into that great military and naval struggle, known as the Seven Years' War.

CHARLES M. ANDREWS.